

“Be the Breakthrough”

Isaiah 58:1-12

Big Idea: Fasting that pleases God leads to renewal, restoration, and revival for others.

It was in college that I was first introduced to the practice of fasting. Every year, we were invited to fast for a week and then serve together over the weekend. I remember thinking, What a strange combination. How can I serve on an empty stomach?

We would fast all week, and then on the weekend go around our college town—knocking on doors after a night of parties—offering to clean grimy apartments, pray with people, and share the gospel. We weren’t just seeking personal discipline—we were longing for revival in our college town.

One core memory I still carry is cleaning someone’s kitchen while they cooked an egg in butter with wheat toast. I craved that egg, butter, and toast.

I’m grateful for the leaders who shaped us, because what we learned is that fasting isn’t just about what we give up—food, comfort, routines. It’s about what fasting frees us to give ourselves toward.

So let me ask you a question: When we fast, pray, or practice spiritual disciplines, what are we actually hoping will happen? Personal clarity? Spiritual growth? Or the renewal of people and places around us?

That’s the tension in our text today. In Isaiah 58, God speaks to people who were fasting—doing the right religious practice—but whose devotion had become disconnected from love of neighbor. So God steps in to redefine the kind of fasting that truly pleases Him.

Isaiah 58:1–5

1 “Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

2 For day after day they seek me out;

they seem eager to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that does what is right

and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions

and seem eager for God to come near them.

3 'Why have we fasted,' they say,
'and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.

4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?

Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Before God tells them what kind of fasting He desires, He explains what's gone wrong.

In verses 1–5, God tells Isaiah to speak plainly. The issue isn't that the people have abandoned spiritual practices—they are fasting, praying, and seeking God. The problem is that their devotion has become disconnected from obedience. God exposes their transgression, not their irreligion.

They genuinely seek the Lord and ask for His guidance, but they do so as if they were living righteously while ignoring the kind of justice God actually cares about. Their fasting assumes that God should respond on their terms. When they ask, "Why have we fasted, and you do not see it?" it reveals an expectation of reward rather than a posture of humility.

What makes it even more striking is that while they are fasting, they are still exploiting others, quarreling, and hurting one another. Their devotion is directed upward, but it never moves outward. Their religious practice does not shape the way they treat people.

In the end, they are using fasting to try to secure God's favor rather than submitting themselves to God's will. But God cannot be manipulated. He sees the heart beneath the practice, not just the practice itself.

And this is where the text presses on us as well. Because it's possible to be sincere in our devotion and still be out of step with God's heart. Not because we hate God, but because we're blind to how easily our spirituality can turn inward.

So with that diagnosis in place, God asks the question that leads us into the rest of the passage: "Is this not the fast that I choose?"

Isaiah 58:6-12

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—

when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,

with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry

and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,

then your light will rise in the darkness,

and your night will become like the noonday.

11 The Lord will guide you always;

he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land

and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,

like a spring whose waters never fail.

12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins

and will raise up the age-old foundations;

you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,

Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

BREAK EVERY YOKE — True fasting sets others free. (vv.6-7)

I want to introduce you to one of the most haunting and dangerous practices:
performative spirituality.

It looks like devotion. It sounds like faith. It even feels sincere. But God says it is possible to seek Him daily, fast regularly, and still be far from His heart. In Isaiah 58, God confronts a people who were doing all the right religious things—yet using their spirituality to hide injustice, excuse cruelty, and ignore the suffering around them.

Performative spirituality is when our devotion is visible, but our obedience is absent. And it is exposed not by what a person says, but by what they refuse to do. When devotion to God is real, it always moves outward. That's why God's first correction is not about singing louder or fasting longer, but about justice:

*Loose the chains of injustice,
untie the cords of the yoke,
set the oppressed free,
and break every yoke.*

Now, it's easy to hear that and keep it abstract—Yeah, let's break chains. Let's free captives. But in Isaiah's day, these were not poetic exaggerations. They were economic and social realities.

Other prophets like Amos and Micah tell the same story. While Israel fasted and held worship gatherings, their economic practices went untouched. Workers were exploited. Debts were enforced without mercy. Power was used to benefit the few while the vulnerable paid the cost.

God's problem wasn't commerce. It was compartmentalization. They believed they could be devoted to God while disconnected from the well-being of others.

And before we shake our heads at ancient Israel, we should look in the mirror. Because yes, Israel failed to fast the way God desired — and so do we. But there is One Israelite who never failed — Jesus. He fasted perfectly and then he moved towards people.

True fasting, God says, confronts the systems that crush people.

That means:

- We cannot be indifferent to fair wages.
- We cannot turn a blind eye to corruption that exploits the vulnerable.
- We cannot treat the working poor as invisible.
- We cannot dehumanize those made in the image of God.

True fasting calls us to personal and public righteousness—to use our influence, our voice, our resources, and yes, our positions of leadership and influence, to loosen what binds others.

But Isaiah doesn't stop there.

Because breaking yokes in the system must also lead to treating those right in front of us with righteousness.

FEED THE HUNGRY — Breakthrough flows outward in compassion. (vv.6-7)

This whole week, as I've been preparing my heart for this message—Be the Breakthrough—I've been praying a very simple prayer:

“God, give me an opportunity to be the breakthrough. Help me see someone You want me to bless, help, feed, or care for.” And God did. *****testimony here.

Because after Isaiah confronts injustice at the level of systems, God does something very intentional. He brings it home.

And this is where we need to be careful.

One of the dangers of viewing life primarily through political lenses—left or right, federal or local, president or governor—is that responsibility always feels like it belongs somewhere else. Either the government should fix it, or individuals should have done better. And while there are real conversations to be had there, **Isaiah 58 refuses to let God's people outsource compassion.** *Tell your neighbor, “Don't outsource compassion”.*

God does not say, “Make sure someone feeds the hungry.” “Make sure someone clothes the naked”. “Make sure someone treats the wanderer kindly”.

He says, *“Is it not for YOU to share YOUR food with the hungry?”*

YOU. ME. WE. US. God's people.

In other words, before this becomes a policy discussion, God makes it a discipleship issue. God names **three people groups** Israel could not ignore: the hungry, the wanderer, and the naked.

These are not abstract categories. They are the people right in front of us.

- **The hungry**—those lacking daily provision.
Our instinct is often to ask, “Why are they hungry?”
But God does not ask us to start with investigation.
He starts with compassion.

“Is it not for you to share your food with the hungry?”

- **The wanderer**—the displaced, the unhoused, the immigrant.
God does not ask us to begin with verification.
He begins with hospitality.
“Provide the poor wanderer with shelter.”
- **The naked**—those exposed, vulnerable, without dignity or protection.
God does not first ask us to diagnose the reason for their brokenness.
He commands us to restore dignity.
“When you see the naked, clothe them.”

John the Baptist echoes this same teaching when he say, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

In every generation, God’s people are tempted to debate responsibility. And in every generation, God simply says: “Do not look away.”

“One effect of true holiness is to make us deeply interested in various benevolent enterprises. It takes us out of ourselves. It enlists our energies in behalf of interests that have no direct bearing on our personal affairs. We give our time and money for that which brings us neither profit nor reputation.”

B.T. Roberts, (1885) Founder of the Free Methodist Church

I love about God’s heart because even in his toughest rebukes he is kind and invites us to return to him. The last section lays out a string of God’s promises. Because when we align with God’s heart, we step into his promises.

Listen to the promises of verses 8-11:

When we fast this way—
Light breaks through darkness.
Healing springs up quickly.
God’s presence goes before us and guards behind us.
He hears when we cry.
He guides us continually.
He satisfies dry places and strengthens weary souls.

When we look at all these promises, you know what they all point to? Jesus. Fasting doesn’t earn God’s promises— it opens our eyes to the One who already fulfilled them: Jesus. He is the light that came into our darkness, he brings healing, He is present with us and guides our path, and satisfies us. So when we fast with the right heart we position ourselves to experience the countless promises of God. Hallelujah!

BE A REPAIRER OF THE BREACH — We're called to restore what's broken.
(vv.8-12)

The final promise God makes in Isaiah 58 is this: when lives align with God's heart, He calls us **Repairers of the Breach**.

A breach is a gap where something that was meant to protect no longer holds.

- In families, breaches look like generational sin, bitterness, and silence.
In communities, breaches look like mistrust, division, and neglect.
In societies, breaches look like people falling through cracks no one takes responsibility for.

And here's what's important: **breaches are never only personal—and they are never only public**. They form where private sin and public neglect meet.

ENGLAND, 1700s & METHODISM | A Living Picture of Isaiah 58

If you want to see what Isaiah 58 looks like lived out in history, you don't have to imagine it—you can study it.

Take a field trip with me to one of my favorite cities in the world: **London, England**, around the early 1700s.

I've walked those streets. I've stood near the places where this story unfolded. And when you know what England was like then, you realize—this nation was full of breaches!!!

- There was widespread poverty and hunger.
- Children working long hours in dangerous conditions: 7-9 year olds working 12-14 hour shifts six days a week in mills, mines, and chimney sweeps.
- Drunkenness, violence, and despair woven into daily life. By the early 1700s, London was in the grip of what historians call the "Gin Craze," with millions of gallons consumed each year and entire neighborhoods unraveling under the weight of addiction.
- England was industrially advancing—but spiritually falling apart.

The walls were standing, but the gaps were everywhere.

And the Church of England, for the most part, was functioning—but contained to stone buildings. Sermons were delivered to those who already belonged. Faith was practiced, but often kept orderly, respectable, and private.

Preaching was meant to stay in the sanctuary. Religion was meant to stay inside the walls. So when John Wesley and others began to feel burdened for the poor, the workers, the miners, the forgotten—there was tension. Real tension.

Wesley was troubled by a simple question: **What do you do when the people who most need the gospel will never step inside the church?**

The answer he came to was revolutionary. **He stepped outside.**

Against custom. Against criticism. Against church approval at times—Wesley and his friends took the gospel to the streets, the fields, the mines. He preached to workers before dawn. He preached in open air to people the church had written off as unreachable.

And here's what's important: Wesley didn't abandon spiritual discipline to do this. He practiced fasting, prayer, holiness, accountability. But his spirituality would not stay private. It spread like wildfire to other Christians that were hungry for a true Christianity, not dead religion! Wesley's followers soon became known as Methodists.

- Methodists fed the poor.
- They educated children.
- They visited prisons.
- They opposed slavery.
- They organized care for widows and workers.

This was Isaiah 58 in motion.

They didn't choose between personal righteousness and public justice. They lived both. And when God repaired the breach in their hearts, He repaired the breaches in their nation. **Revival broke out**—the Methodist revival swept through England, reaching tens of thousands directly and shaping the lives of hundreds of thousands more. Through outdoor preaching, disciplined community, care for the poor, and a call to holy living, Methodism reduced drunkenness, increased literacy, strengthened families, and restored dignity to the working class. Historians—even critics—acknowledge its role in stabilizing English society and renewing spiritual life. This was revival that repaired breaches!

And if you want to see God bring breakthrough through you, it begins with...your neighbor fasting, your husband fasting, your children fasting and starting to behave....noooo...it begins with YOU. Say, "it begins with me".

Let me tell you how John Wesley lived this. Wesley fasted twice a week; Wednesdays and Fridays. One day after a fast, he met a young woman shivering with

no coat. *Remember this is winter in England, not SoCal.* When he reached into his pocket to help, he realized he couldn't — he had spent his extra money on home decor. Wesley wrote that he could not 'enjoy the luxuries of life while the poor lacked necessities.' So he made a covenant: live simply, give radically. And because he fasted and spent less on himself, he created margin in his finances to be more generous. Fasting didn't just change Wesley — it changed England.

As we fast these remaining 7 days, church, remember this: **we don't fast to earn God's love— we fast because in Jesus we already have it.** Fasting isn't a transaction to get God's attention; it is an invitation to align our lives to His heart.

And imagine — just imagine — what would happen if God found a church right here in Long Beach willing to be that kind of people. **Imagine families, small groups, teens and grandparents becoming repairers of the breach in our neighborhoods, in our schools, workplaces, and streets.**

Because breakthrough doesn't stop with you. **Breakthrough is something God does in you, around you, and then through you** to bless others.

So when you fast this week, don't ask only for clarity or comfort — ask God to make you someone's breakthrough. Let your devotion move outward. Let your private seeking become public blessing.

Prayer: Lord, when we fast, help us witness breakthrough in us, breakthrough around us, and breakthrough through us. Make us repairers of the breach in our city, for Your glory, amen.